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'Perfect for SpaceX employees': Texas locals unhappy as realtors lure Elon Musk's engineers with listings

Kate Duffy Jun 4, 2022, 12:00 AM



Elon Musk's SpaceX is based in a south Texas village called Boca Chica. AFP/Getty Images

Realtors in south Texas are tailoring house listings to SpaceX workers, but residents aren't happy.

"Perfect for SpaceX workers" and "just minutes away from SpaceX" are written on some listings.

Brownsville locals told Insider they are upset that realtors are luring SpaceX staff to the area.

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Residents in a south Texas city next to SpaceX's facility are upset about real estate agents attracting the company's workers through property listings.

SpaceX CEO Elon Musk [pleaded](#) in March 2021 for engineers, technicians, builders, and other workers to move to the city of Brownsville or South Padre Island, close to the company's Starbase

facility in the coastal village of Boca Chica.

Since then, properties in the area that were on the market for years have sold in a matter of months, said Craig Grove, real estate broker and owner of Texas-based GRT Realty.

"Most agents now — if they feel like it is good for SpaceX workers — they may put a copy in [the listing] about it being an easy commute to Starbase," Grove told Insider, adding that his firm does what it can to attract the company's employees.

One of GRT's online [listings](#) says "only minutes away from SpaceX!" Other [listings](#) advertise a 15- or 20-minute drive from SpaceX's Starbase.

Houses recently listed on Facebook Marketplace have similar descriptions. One [property](#) for rent is described as "perfect for SpaceX workers," while others are considered "just [minutes away](#) from SpaceX" and "[conveniently located](#) near SpaceX and Boca Chica beach."

David Prchal, a realtor at GRT, told Insider the real estate company has dealt with many clients who have worked at SpaceX. Grove said he even set up a subsidiary of GRT called "Starbase Realty" designed to cater for SpaceX workers.

Grove told Insider that SpaceX has definitely had an impact on the housing market in Brownsville. He said the average property that SpaceX employees tend to rent or buy is newly built, has three to four bedrooms, a two-car garage, and costs between \$250,000 and \$350,000.

Bruno Zavaleta, a broker who owns Zavaleta Realty, told Insider that SpaceX's presence in Brownsville is definitely having an impact on residents.

"We have seen the price of homes and rentals gradually increase so some residents feel they have been out priced," he said, but added that he doesn't tailor his listings to SpaceX employees.

Locals are upset

Residents of Brownsville — considered one of the [poorest cities in the US](#) — have criticized SpaceX for destroying the surrounding [environmental habitats](#), but they're also worried about rising house prices.

Emma Guevara, Brownsville resident and organizer of the environmental nonprofit Sierra Club, told Insider a common problem in Brownsville is that locals can't afford the jump in house prices after SpaceX came to the area. Soaring inflation was making the issue worse, she added.

"The landlords are all kissing [Musk's] ass and they can't understand why we're so mad about it," Guevara said. "They're making money out of this — it's a great time for them, but it's bleeding the life outta the rest of us."

Her rent jumped by \$175 from one month to the next and other locals have told her about their struggles with affording their own homes, she said.

Josette Hinojosa, a clerk and long-time Brownsville resident, told

Insider she finds it "utterly disgusting and disturbing" that realtors are using particular wording in listings to attract SpaceX employees. Her rent for the house she's lived in for 10 years will rise in July by \$425, she said.

"Californians who have made their way to Texas tend to have an economic advantage, and can afford to buy up multiple properties throughout the state," Hinojosa said.

Jerry Ruiz, a local who is a member of the South Texas Environmental Justice Network, told Insider how he and other residents were upset about how much land SpaceX was occupying.

"We're just tiny Davids against a huge Goliath — the richest man in the world," Ruiz said. The situation is depressing and makes him angry, he said.

SpaceX did not respond to Insider's request for comment.

SpaceX isn't totally to blame

Grove said that although locals were "upset due to SpaceX," Musk's company wasn't the sole reason for the increase in property prices in Brownsville. He said the nationwide housing shortage and rising inflation have also affected the market.

"I don't want gloss over the people who have been affected," Grove said. "At end of day, nothing you do is going to be 100% great for everybody."





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